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ABSTRACT

The author gives his definition of accountability as "the process of expecting each member of an organization to answer to someone" and says that professional educators should be held answerable for children's learning which is the major goal of public education. The roles of all the people involved in the system are facilitating roles to that end and each should be held accountable to the others. The two groups most concerned in the current emphasis on accountability are school administrators and teachers. Administrators must be held accountable for the provision and maintenance of good learning environments, for the efficient and effective use of resources, and for individual student learning for the resources used. They must make increased use of proven management techniques and develop an action program for their school system. Classroom teachers have felt most threatened by the concept of accountability. They need to develop performance objectives for each student and to make increased use of validated educational technologies. The teacher should not be held at fault if a student does not learn after all the known techniques and strategies have been tried. Boards of school directors at the national, state, and local levels must also be held accountable for their portions of the system if we are to have greater productivity in public education. MBM)

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AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

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SPEAKER : Dr. J.P.Wescott, Associate Professor of Educational Administration, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia.

TOPIC : ACCOUNTABILITY: FOR WHOM, TO WHOM, FOR WHAT?

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(Thanks for being invited to make these remarks)

I would like to say at the outset that I have been very pleased to have been working at Georgia State University in Atlanta for the past two years with Dr. Leon Lessinger who, as you are all aware, has been a prime instigator in the movement for accountability in public education. The opportunity afforded me by this relationship has been to attempt to apply concrete practices to the theory of accountability, a very great challenge. I am convinced that it will become more and more challenging as the movement grows and permeates all of private and public education from the universities to the preschool centers.

In the brief time allotted to me this morning, I would like to attempt a definition of accountability; a peer into the crystal ball to see what accountability will do for us; an expression of a few of my biases having to do with why we need accountability; and finally, an attempt to discuss the subject of this seminar--who will be accountable? To whom? And for what?

What is Accountability?

Many defintions have been suggested in the literature. I like to put things simply. To me, accountability refers to the process of expecting each member of an organization to answer to someone.

Lessinger had offered a more detailed definition. He suggests that accountability is the product of a process. He suggests that an agent whether public or private entering into a contractual agreement to perform a service will be held answerable for performing according to agreed upon terms.

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Either of these definitions of accountability requires that the parties to the contract keep clear and complete records and that this information must be made available for outside review.

The concept portrays the meaning that professional educators should be held answerable for childrens' learning. This seems to me to be an extremely powerful argument and is currently held by taxpayers, legislators, and school board directors.

What Will It Do?

Any movement toward being accountable in terms of student achievement in relation to the resources applied whether in a state school system, a larger school district, or in an individual school building will help to restore a loss of credibility in the eyes of the general public. We must admit that, at this time, public education is not held in the highest esteem. Our image is not what it once was for a number of reasons.

Being accountable in terms of student achievement for the resources that are presently being put into public education will assist us greatly at the appropriations tables across our nation. This particular arena is probably where the concept of accountability will help us most.

Who? To Whom? For What?

It is apparent that any school system can be seen as an almost infinite number of subsystems--many could be characterized as technical subsystems--but probably most of the subsystems fall under the category of social systems. It also seems apparent that the people involved in social subsystems play different roles. The school system involves people at the national and state

levels as well as parents and community members, large numbers of professional educators, and last but not least by far numbers of students. This particular social system called public education has as its major goal behavioral change in young people--student learning. The roles of all of the other people involved in this particular system are facilitating roles to that end.

Within the concept of accountability each of these persons should be held accountable to the others.

It will be the responsibility of people acting on boards of directors at the national, state, and local levels to provide sound educational policies: to see to it that strong educational leadership is available as well as the financial resources to get the job done. In these activities, the members of the boards of directors seem to me to be accountable to the nation as a whole, to the states individually and to the community within which they live. Undoubtedly, these people are accountable to the administrators and teachers who are attempting to carry out their wishes. Most particularly, the adults on boards of directors are accountable to the students within their school systems for relevant plans and policies.

The adults living within each particular community and the parents of the school children have long been responsible for positive attitudes toward learning, for resource provision, and for sound educational direction. In fact, they have been accountable in a rather direct way, for recognized poor public educational systems have impeded community growth and prosperity. At the present time, parents and community leaders are more active in offering direction to school systems than they have been for many years. They should be held accountable to the school system, to the students, and to themselves

for clearly defining what it is they want schools to do within their community. What, in fact, they will pay for.

It is to the main body of professional educators--the administrators, supervisors, specialists, and classroom teachers--to whom the current press for accountability is aimed. Before discussing these positions in some depth, I would like, however, to comment upon student accountability.

Wouldn't it be great if we could somehow instil the sense of responsibility in each student to himself or to herself for the effective use of time and energy; for the maintenance of a learning environment; for self-actualization. This concept of the student being accountable to himself for his learning seems to me to be the most important. However, students must be held accountable to society, to their teachers and administrators, and to their peers for helping to establish and maintain a learning environment.

Perhaps, peer accountability for their behavior at this time in our history is the most potent. Teachers have attempted to hold students accountable for effective use of their time through the concept of fear--fear of failure; fear of a low grade; fear of staying after school; fear of expulsion. In my opinion, the very worst possible motivational concept.

I will turn now to the two groups of people at whom this press for accountability has been aimed. I refer to those who administer school systems and those who teach the children.

First, it seems to me that administrators must be held accountable for the provision and maintenance of good learning environments within our school buildings and within our classrooms. They must be held accountable, further, for the efficient and effective managerial and instructional practices--for

efficient and effective use of resources. And I refer not only to money as resources, but also to teacher time and energy, pupil time and energy, facilities, etc.

Administrators have long been very accountable in terms of fiscal accountability and in terms of pupil accounting. Needless to say these practices must continue.

But as well, administrators must be accountable to the community in terms of individual student learning for the resources used. The focus of the schooling enterprise must shift dramatically from teaching to learning, from process to product, from courses taken to competencies demonstrated by each individual student.

For school administrators such as yourselves, accountability requires strengthening of the board power as well as increasing the involvement of many publics in both curricular and administrative policies toward an improved public understanding of education.

Administrators must make increased use of proven management techniques such as what is referred to in business and industry as management by objectives, and what we in education are attempting to adapt under the title Planning-Programming-Budgeting-Evaluation Systems.

Administrators--both central office and building administrators--must become aware of and implement the techniques and strategies of accountability. I refer to the judicial use of performance contracting--perhaps within the system or outside the systme--, independent achievement audits, the use of risk capital for incentives, the use of management support teams, the implementation of quality assurance and quality control systems and many other useful business practices borrowed from industry.

In their attempts to become accountable to the community, to their teachers and non-certificated personnel, to their board of directors, and to their students, central office administrators, it seems to me, must develop an action program for their school systems. This action program should consist of:

a. the adoption and implementation of official accountability policies requiring independent accomplishment audits relating intended accomplishments to actual results.

b. the setting up of regular policies and procedures to locate good practice and see to it that these better ways become standard practices in the classroom.

c. the setting aside of money to be used as developmental capital.

d. giving teaching personnel--through school or team units--bonus pay for achieving demonstrable results in tough learning areas.

e. instituting quality controls and feedback procedures for all educational programs.

f. planning, adopting, and implementing a short and a long-range program to increase educational productivity.

g. involving the staff, students, and the community in the design and implementation of the accountability program.

It seems to me that the professional building principals of the 70's must possess certain skills if he is to be accountable to his community, students, teachers, and superiors. He must be able:

a. to develop acceptable performance objectives and to teach others to do the same.

b. to develop acceptable units of systematic instruction and to teach others to write programs.

c. to link proper modes of proof to varieties of student learning and to train others in the utilization of these different techniques.

d. to prepare requests for proposals to meet priorities and to successfully match performance contract bids with requests for proposals and to train others to do these.

e. to develop the critical elements of the PPBES model for his or her school and implement the plan.

f. to develop a charter of accountability based upon policy for his or her school.

g. to develop a quality control system on stipulated priorities.

I believe that there are some enabling objectives which must come first for the building principal. I suggest that in order to learn these competencies, principals must understand and be able to apply the language of accountability, general systems theory, the resource management and accountability model along with the use of such planning tools as PERT, CPM, etc., policy making, various evaluation techniques, and, perhaps, zero-based budgeting.

Perhaps the classroom teachers have been most threatened by the language and concept of accountability. They are little less threatened, in my experience with them, by the notion of productivity. This movement seems to me to ask that classroom teachers become professional educators. In their efforts to be accountable to their students, to the community, to their superiors, their colleagues, and particularly to themselves, accountability asks them to find better classroom practices. Increased productivity demands that teachers develop performance objectives for each individual student; guide his learning activities; and determine his growth.

Teachers must make increased use of validated educational technologies. They must practice success teaching. They must divest themselves of malpractice.

There is a nuance to the concept of accountability which when understood by the classroom teacher allows her to be free of the fear of inspection. That nuance is simply this: that the teacher cannot be held at fault if

Johnny does not learn to read providing she has tried all of the known techniques and strategies (and some that she has created) to cause Johnny to read. We are all aware that young people come to us bringing many attributes over which we have no control. If Johnny still cannot read after the teacher's trying all of the known methods, then the teacher cannot be held at fault. After all, doctors occassionally lose patients on the operating table and lawyers occassionally lose cases in court after applying all of their professional know-how.

Summary

I've attempted to point out here this morning that all of the adults who have to do with childrens' learning and the children themselves are to be held accountable each to the other in varying degrees and in various ways. All of the adults of the community have a job to do. The emphasis at the present time appears to be on the activities of the school administrators and the classroom teachers. However, boards of school directors at the national, state, and local levels must be held accountable for their portions of the overall system if we are to have greater productivity in public education.

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